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TAGS: PREL PGOV JA RS  
SUBJECT: RUSSIA-JAPAN: FUKUDA TO MOSCOW AND MEDVEDEV TO HOKKAIDO

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary. According to Russian officials, PM Fukuda's April 25 visit to Moscow is designed to continue the positive bilateral dialogue and prepare for the G8 Summit. The Japanese Embassy described it as an all-out effort to maintain the momentum, however small, for the talks on the territorial issue during Russia's presidential transition. Medvedev will head the GOR G8 delegation, with Putin confirming that he will not be in tow. End summary.

Positive Tone

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¶2. (C) According to MFA officials, the on-again-off-again-on-again visit by FM Komura to Moscow on April 15 reinforced the recent "positive" tone in the relationship. The MFA issued three statements on the Lavrov-Komura meeting, re-affirming Putin's "promise" (in his February reply to an earlier Fukuda letter) to bring all aspects of the bilateral relationship to a higher level. Lavrov indicated that "trust was growing in the political dialogue" between the two countries. The FMs agreed to early June pre-G8 consultations of DFMs in Tokyo. The new DFM on Asia Aleksey Borodavkin will be in charge of G8 preparations from the Russian side.

Medvedev Takes the Lead in Hokkaido?

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¶3. (C) MFA Japan Desk Head Aleksandr Iliyshov told us April 18 that while the GOR did not expect to overcome the "lingering differences" on the territorial issues soon, its search for a solution was being aided by the positive dynamics that had emerged in the bilateral relationship. In response to whether Putin would be on the Russian delegation for the Hokkaido G8 meeting, Iliyshov simply repeated the MFA earlier announcement that Medvedev would lead. On April 18, Putin re-affirmed to a group of journalists his intention not to participate in the Hokkaido meeting.

Starting Off Right with Medvedev

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¶4. (C) Jun Nanazawa of the Japanese Embassy said that the GOJ made an all-out effort to arrange the Fukuda visit to Moscow before Medvedev's May 7 inauguration. Amid his troubles with the Upper House of the Diet, Fukuda canceled his planned trips to Europe, but decided to keep his Russia program in order to meet with both Medvedev and Putin before the Hokkaido G8 Summit. Although a friendly relationship was initiated during the March 11 Fukuda-Medvedev telephone conversation, Fukuda wanted to reinforce Medvedev's good feeling about Japan in Moscow, as well as in Hokkaido. Per Nanazawa, the GOJ "promised" the GOR not to raise the territorial issue during main G8 sessions, but to limit it to the bilateral meetings on the margins. The Japanese Embassy

emphasized the importance of keeping the small momentum gathered in recent years by continuing a high-level dialogue.

Nanazawa noted that nearly all of the two-hour meeting between Lavrov and Komura was devoted to the islands.

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